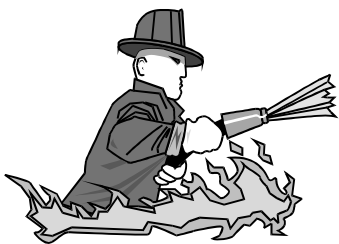




## Backgrounder — House and Building Fires



**“Fire is the fourth largest accidental killer in the United States.”**

### Emergency Information

The leading cause of death in a fire is asphyxiation. Fire victims seldom see the flames. Fire consumes the oxygen in the air, thereby increasing the concentration of deadly carbon monoxide in the atmosphere. Inhaling carbon monoxide causes a loss of consciousness or death within minutes.

The heat from a fire can melt clothes and scorch the lungs in a single breath. At floor level, temperatures average about 90°F, but at eye level rise to 600°F.

House fires begin with a bright flame, then quickly generate a black, choking smoke. It is nearly impossible to see through a thick cloud of smoke, so fire drill participants should practice evacuating buildings with their eyes closed.

### Danger Zones

Accidental fire and explosion can strike anywhere. Fire fatalities tend to be distributed according to population density, that is, those states with the largest populations tend also to have the greatest number of fire fatalities.

### What Is a Fire?

Fire is the fourth largest accidental killer in the United States, behind motor vehicle accidents, falls and drownings. It is also the disaster that families are mostly likely to experience. Over 80 percent of all fire deaths occur where people sleep, such as in homes or hotels. Most fires occur when people are less likely to be alert, such as between midnight and morning. Eighty-four percent of house and building fires are accidental, such as those caused by poor electrical wiring or careless behavior. However, 16% are set intentionally through arson or acts of terrorism.

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## Help Your Community Get Ready

Media can raise awareness about fire safety by providing important information to the community. Here are some suggestions:

- Publish a series on how to recognize potential fire hazards in the home and workplace.
- Run a story featuring interviews with local fire officials about how to make homes fire-safe.
- Provide tips on conducting fire drills in the home, mentioning the need for multiple escape routes and a meeting place outside of the home.
- Highlight the importance of home smoke detectors by running monthly "battery-check reminders."

### Cause of Home Fire Death

Cause	Percentage of Deaths
Smoking	26%
Incendiary or suspicious	16%
Heating	14%
Child playing	10%
Electrical distribution	10%
Cooking	8%
All other causes	16%
1986-1990 Annual Average Source: National Fire Protection Association	

## Did You Know...

- Advanced technology has greatly reduced loss of life from fires.
- On average, fires kill nearly 5,500 Americans each year. Over 30,000 people are injured.
- In the United States, someone dies in a fire every 40 minutes. Most often, victims are overcome by smoke.
- Nearly 25 percent of the fires that kill young children are started by children playing.
- Almost 75% of all fire fatalities occur in residential dwellings.
- Fire causes over \$2 billion worth of damage to homes yearly.